

# COFFEE (1980)

By Alan Wakeman

Additional material by Eric Presland

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*[The HOUSEMAN's home. Morning. Doorbell rings. HOUSEMAN answers it. He is in his fifties, serious, bookish. The GASMAN is at the door. He is cheeky, cheerful, Cockney and cute. Mid-20s]*

GASMAN: Morning! Gasboard. I hear you've got a leak.

HOUSEMAN: Well, not personally...

GASMAN: No, a gas leak. Cheeky!

HOUSEMAN: Oh. Yes. Come in. The kitchen's through here. I think I know where the leak is, actually. It's that joint where the pipe goes into the stove.

GASMAN: Right you are. Leave it to me.

*[He takes off his parka, to reveal a tightly fitting t-shirt underneath.]*

HOUSEMAN: Right you are.

*[He is reluctant to leave. GASMAN stares at him, challenging.]*

HOUSEMAN: I'll – er – be in the other room if you need anything. Will you – need anything?

GASMAN: I think I can handle everything myself.

*[GASMAN fiddles with the stove and gets down to work. HOUSEMAN goes into the other room to work. After a few moments he reappears.]*

HOUSEMAN: Er... hello again... Er... I thought you might like a cup of coffee. And buns. Or tea. Or orange squash. Or mineral water. Or milk.

GASMAN: Wow! You're very versatile, aren't you? I wouldn't say no...

HOUSEMAN: I like to keep all options open. The milk's goat's milk. It's very – goat-ey.

GASMAN: Coffee please. Black. But you can't use the cooker. I've had to turn off your stopcock. It was very stiff. Obviously hasn't had a good oiling in years.

HOUSEMAN: There hasn't been much call for it. But don't worry. I can use the electric kettle.

*[He fills the kettle and plugs it in.]*

HOUSEMAN: How long have you been doing this job?

GASMAN: Couple of years. I used to be a milkman but I had to give it up. All those stories about middle-aged housewives throwing themselves at you were true.

HOUSEMAN: You mean like – Ernie

GASMAN: - the fastest milkman in the West. Yes.

HOUSEMAN: You like Benny Hill? He was on last night, I believe.

GASMAN: Not really.

HOUSEMAN: Not your thing, then? Being a milkman?

GASMAN: It was exhausting. I was always running out of cream.

HOUSEMAN: Do you like being a gasman?

GASMAN: It's okay. The money's good. You meet a much more varied range of customers. I like to have the variety. And you can wear what you want to work.

HOUSEMAN: Do you always wear jeans to work?

GASMAN: They're cheap, they're practical.

HOUSEMAN: I bet that's not the only reason.

GASMAN: What other reason would there be?

HOUSEMAN: Well, some young men I know wear them because they think it makes them look... sexy. Hot...

GASMAN: It's taking them off that's sexy, innit? Not putting them on.

HOUSEMAN: *[Laughs]* Yes.

*[The kettle boils.]*

GASMAN: Your kettle's boiling.

HOUSEMAN: What?

GASMAN: It's boiling.

HOUSEMAN: Yes, it is rather hot in here...

*[He takes his top off.]*

HOUSEMAN: That's better.

GASMAN: Yes, much better. Now what about the water...

HOUSEMAN: Oh, of course.

*[HOUSEMAN makes coffee, prepares cups etc. Gives a mug to the GASMAN.]*

HOUSEMAN: Help yourself to milk and sugar. If you want it.

*[As he passes the mug, he spills coffee – accidentally? – down the man's t-shirt.]*

HOUSEMAN: Oh, I'm so sorry.

GASMAN: Don't worry, it's only an old t-shirt. It'll soon dry.

HOUSEMAN: But it'll be all sticky. You don't want that, do you? To be all sticky? Take it off. I'll give it a quick rinse and put it on the boiler. It'll be dry by the time you have to go.

GASMAN: I couldn't possibly impose on you.

*[He is taking the shirt off as he says this. He wipes his chest and underarms.]*

GASMAN: So – er – you reckon jeans make me look sexy, do you?

HOUSEMAN: I didn't say that. I said I had friends who –

GASMAN: Fellas are always chatting me up. I can't think why.

HOUSEMAN: Me neither. Let me see... *[Eyes him appreciatively]*  
What could it possibly be...?

*[GASMAN is almost posing for him.]*

GASMAN: I don't encourage no-one.

HOUSEMAN: Some people might find your manner – provocative.

GASMAN: Really?

HOUSEMAN: And those jeans...

GASMAN: It's only an old pair of jeans, for Chrissake! They're filthy and they stink of sweat.

HOUSEMAN: *[Faintly]* Really?

GASMAN: Specially round the crotch.

*[HOUSEMAN inhales deeply. Pulls himself together.]*

HOUSEMAN: How d'you like your coffee?

GASMAN: In a cup prefereably.

HOUSEMAN: I mean, what do you want in it?

GASMAN: The usual, please. Brandy. LSD. What you got?

HOUSEMAN: Sugar and milk?

GASMAN: Both, please.

*[HOUSEMAN gives both. GASMAN takes his coffee and sips appreciatively.]*

GASMAN: I'm really glad to get my lips round that! Well, the leak's fixed now. Shouldn't have any more trouble. Just needed a spot of grease up your flexible hose.

HOUSEMAN: Thanks. That was quick. Obvious to see you're a real professional.

GASMAN: Nice place you've got here.

HOUSEMAN: It's a bit big, really.

GASMAN: Is that a colour telly you've got there?

HOUSEMAN: Yes. I don't know why I have it really, the amount I watch. There's hardly ever anything decent on.

GASMAN: I've never seen a colour telly working.

HOUSEMAN: There's nothing much on at this time of day.

GASMAN: Some lovely programmes in the evening, though, aren't there. In the EVENINGS.

HOUSEMAN: Yes there are. Often.

*[There is a meaningful pause. They look at each other.]*

GASMAN: Well, I must be pushing off. There's probably a housewife waiting for my services. Just sign here.

HOUSEMAN: *[Signing]* Thanks for doing the job so quickly. You really don't hang about, do you? By the way, there's an interesting wild-life documentary on BBC2 tomorrow. In colour. If you like wild life.

GASMAN: You don't say. I might just pop in, then. If I'm in the area.

*[GASMAN puts on his parka. HOUSEMAN opens the door.]*

HOUSEMAN: You might be lucky and catch me home.

*[GASMAN goes through it.]*

GASMAN: Keep smiling! Maybe you should wear jeans too... See you.

*[The GASMAN exits, and re-enters immediately, rings the bell.]*

GASMAN: Morning! Gasboard. *[Aside: Blimey! This is a bit of all right. Rich bastard here, no doubt. I bet he's public school.]* I hear you've got a leak.

HOUSEMAN: Well, not personally... *[Aside: What a stupid thing to say. Not even funny.]*

GASMAN: *[Not that posh, then. Grammar, not public, I reckon.]* No, a gas leak. Cheeky. *[Why did I say that? He'll think I'm camp.]*

HOUSEMAN: Oh yes. Come in. The kitchen's through there.  
*[Christ, what a gorgeous boy!] I think I know where the leak is, actually. [He can't be more than eighteen. Complete jailbait. Why must I get all these temptations?]* It's that joint where the pipe goes into the stove. *[I could put my pipe in your stove – no, stop it!]*

GASMAN: *[Got your number, mate.]* Right you are, then. Leave it to me.

*[He takes off his parka, to reveal a tightly fitting t-shirt underneath.]*

HOUSEMAN: *[Blimey O'Reilly!]* Right you are.

GASMAN: *[Fancies his chances, does he?]*

*[He is reluctant to leave. GASMAN stares at him challenging.]*

HOUSEMAN: I'll – er – be in the other room if you need anything.  
*[Need something. Please need something. Swarfega, throat lozenges – anything.]* Will you need anything?

GASMAN: *[What does he mean, 'need anything'? What's he suggesting? Does it show?]* I think I can handle everything myself. *[It does show. That was so camp. It just slipped out – there I go again!]*

*[GASMAN fiddles with the stove and gets down to work. HOUSEMAN goes into the other room to work.]*

GASMAN: *[Just look at this place. Some people have all the luck. Must be worth a few bob. I could be on to a good thing here. He's bound to have a go at me. And if I play my cards right...]*

HOUSEMAN: *[I will not make a pass at him. No way. No matter how sexy he is. Life's far too complicated. Still... only polite to offer him a coffee...]*

*[After a few moments he reappears.]*

HOUSEMAN: Er... hello again... Er... I thought you might like a cup of coffee. *[I couldn't concentrate. I couldn't stop thinking about those gorgeous buns.]* And buns. Or tea. Or orange squash. Or mineral water.

GASMAN: *[He's off already!]* Wow! You're very versatile, aren't you? I wouldn't say no. *[Don't push it. He'll think you're really one of them.]*

HOUSEMAN: I like to keep all options open. *[Good God, I think he actually might be.]* The milk's goat's milk. *[That is so pretentious.]* It's very goat-ey. *[Like your armpits, I bet. Oh stop. Be still my beating heart!]*

GASMAN: Coffee please. Black. But you can't use the cooker though. I've had to turn off your stopcock. *[That's made you smirk, hasn't it, you old sod. Well, how do you like this?]* It was very stiff. Obviously hadn't had a good oiling in years.

HOUSEMAN: *[Little bastard!]* There hasn't been much call for it. But don't worry, I can use the electric kettle.

*[He fills the kettle and plugs it in.]*

HOUSEMAN: *[Why does it happen to me? It's not fair. Other people get old men in baggy overalls with a fag-end behind their ears and nicotine-stained fingers. I have to get beautiful boys in skin tight jeans. It's not fair. It's bad for my blood pressure.]* How long have you been doing this job?

GASMAN: Couple of years. I used to be a milkman, but I had to give it up. *[Let's confuse him.]* All those stories about middle-aged housewives throwing themselves at you were true.

HOUSEMAN: You mean like – Ernie –

GASMAN: The fastest milkman in the west? Yes.

- HOUSEMAN: *[That's just about your level, isn't it? Benny Hill. That's a shame. I bet you never even heard of Rowan and Martin.]* You like Benny Hill?
- GASMAN: Not really.
- HOUSEMAN: *[There's hope yet!]* Not your thing, then? Being a milkman? *[Fingers crossed...]*
- GASMAN: It was exhausting. I was always running out of cream.
- HOUSEMAN: *[I don't know what to think now.]* Do you like being a gasman?
- GASMAN: It's okay. The money's good. You meet a much more varied range of customers. I like to have the variety. *[Dangle it in front of him again.]* And you can wear what you want to wear to work.
- HOUSEMAN: Do you always wear jeans to work? *[Shall I? Oh, to hell with it.]* Tight jeans.
- GASMAN: *[And we're over the second!]* They're cheap, they're practical.
- HOUSEMAN: I bet that's not the only reason. *[As if you didn't know how well they show off your pert little buttocks!]*
- GASMAN: What other reason would there be? *[Third hurdle! We're getting there.]*
- HOUSEMAN: *[Are you really that naïve? Or just fishing for compliments?]* Well, some young men I know *[What young men? I don't know any young men, that's my problem.]* they wear them because they think it makes them look... sexy. *[Doesn't he realise? Is he that thick?]* Hot...
- GASMAN: *[Was I right, or was I right?]* It's taking them off that's sexy, innit? Not putting them on.

HOUSEMAN: Yes. *[And very lovely you would look too. You are flirting with me, you little bastard.]*

*[The kettle boils]*

HOUSEMAN: *[But I bet you'd thump me if I tried anything. Anyway I don't fancy you that much. Not enough for a black eye. No, I've decided. I'll make your coffee and leave you to it.]*

GASMAN: Your kettle's boiling.

HOUSEMAN: What?

GASMAN: It's boiling.

HOUSEMAN: *[There's an opening I can't resist.]* Yes, it is rather hot in here...

*[He takes his top off.]*

HOUSEMAN: That's better. *[And you could make it twice as better – good.]*

GASMAN: Yes, much better. *[He doesn't look that bad for an oldie...]* Now what about the water?

*[HOUSEMAN makes coffee, prepares cups etc.]*

GASMAN: *[Poor old bloke. I bet he's really lonely. Probably chatting up is as far as you ever go, isn't it? Don't suppose he's ever been to bed with anyone. A virgin, yes. That makes sense.]*

*[HOUSEMAN gives the mug to the GASMAN.]*

HOUSEMAN: Help yourself to milk and sugar. *[In fact, help yourself to anything.]*

*[As he hands the mug over, he spills some coffee – accidentally? – down the man's t-shirt.]*

HOUSEMAN: Oh, I'm so sorry. *[Now there's a chance...]*

GASMAN: Don't worry, it's only an old t-shirt. It'll soon dry. *[I'm not taking it off for you.]*

HOUSEMAN: But it'll be all sticky. You don't want that, do you? To be all sticky? *[Oh, I hope you do.]* I'll give it a quick rinse and put it on the boiler. It'll be dry by the time you have to go. *[And with any luck that won't be for hours. After I've shown you 'sticky'.]*

GASMAN: I couldn't possibly impose on you. *[Like hell I couldn't]*

*[He is taking his shirt off as he says this. He wipes his chest and underarms.]*

GASMAN: So, you think jeans make me look sexy, do you?

HOUSEMAN: I didn't say that! I said OTHER people...

GASMAN: Fellas are always chatting me up. I can't think why.

HOUSEMAN: Me neither. Let me see... *[Eyes him appreciatively]*  
What could it possibly be...?

*[GASMAN is almost posing for him.]*

GASMAN: I don't encourage no-one. *[But I wonder what it would be like with an older bloke... Just once... just for the craik... Life's rich pageant, and all that.]*

HOUSEMAN: Some people might find your manner of dress – provocative.

GASMAN: Really?

HOUSEMAN: And those jeans...

GASMAN: It's only an old pair of jeans, for Chrissake!

HOUSEMAN: *[And the fact that you must have been melted down and poured into them is purely coincidental, I suppose.]* How do you like your coffee?

GASMAN: In a cup, preferably.

HOUSEMAN: I mean, what do you want in it?

GASMAN: The usual, please. Brandy. LSD. *[I wonder if he's every dropped acid. Doesn't look the type at all.]* What have you got?

HOUSEMAN: Sugar and milk.

GASMAN: *[Definitely not the type, didn't even smile.]* Both, please. *[Have you lost interest, then? Your trouble, you don't fancy your chances enough. Just because you're old. Or oldish. Or a little older. Pity. I think I could have a go with you. You're not exactly ugly. Bet you were quite a looker in your day.]*

*[HOUSEMAN has put milk and sugar in.]*

GASMAN: Two, please.

*[HOUSEMAN gives both, stirs, hands it to him.]*

GASMAN: *[You give up too easily, mate.]* I'm really glad to get my lips round that. Well, your leak's fixed now. Shouldn't have any more trouble. Just needed a spot of grease up your flexible hose.

HOUSEMAN: *[Don't we all...]* Thanks. That was quick. Obvious to see you're a real professional. *[At least in one respect. I wonder if he... No!]*

*[HOUSEMAN moves away. They drink their coffees.]*

HOUSEMAN: *[I wonder what you'd be like if I really got to know you. Do you ever wonder about the meaning of life? Do you ever think about growing old? Death? What goes on in that pretty little head of yours? Nothing, probably.]*

GASMAN: *[P'raps I could get something from an older man. I don't mean money, I mean experience of life. Experience of all sorts of things... Well... no time like the present... give it a go...]* Nice place you've got here.

HOUSEMAN: It's a bit big, really. *[Plenty of room for two. If the right man comes along...]*

GASMAN: Is that a colour telly you've got there.

HOUSEMAN: Yes. I don't know why I have it really, the amount I watch. There's hardly ever anything decent on.

GASMAN: *[Here goes...]* I've never seen a colour telly working.

HOUSEMAN: There's nothing much on at this time of day.

GASMAN: *[He hasn't got it at all.]* Some lovely programmes in the evening, though, aren't there? In the EVENINGS.

HOUSEMAN: Yes there are. Often. *[I do believe he's coming on to me.]*

*[There is a pause. They look at each other.]*

GASMAN: *[Poor old sod. He just can't get it together. Might have been interesting, but I don't fancy him that much, to put myself out.]* Well, I must be off. There's probably a housewife waiting for my services. Just sign here.

*[He gives HOUSEMAN a clipboard. They are standing very close together.]*

HOUSEMAN: *[He's got fabulous skin. And I can feel his body heat.]*  
Thank you for doing the job so quickly.

GASMAN: *[His hands are shaking. I think he's actually trembling.]*

HOUSEMAN: *[Dare I? Dare I? What am I letting myself in for?]*

GASMAN: *[Oh, come on, you can do it]*

HOUSEMAN: *[What if he turns me down? It would be so embarrassing...]*

GASMAN: *[You've only got to ask...]*

HOUSEMAN: *[Ask him something innocent. He can only say no. Where's the harm in that?]* By the way, there's an interesting wild life documentary on BBC2 tomorrow evening.

GASMAN: *[Yes!]*

HOUSEMAN: In colour. If you like wild life. *[I'll show you wild life.]*

GASMAN: *[Wild life with you? Fantastic. And you'd better make it really wild.]*

HOUSEMAN: *[It won't just be animals on the screen.]*

GASMAN: *[I could do with knowing more about mating habits.]*

HOUSEMAN: *[I'm excited already.]*

GASMAN: *[I'm so excited – I hope it doesn't show.]* You don't say. I might just pop in, then. If I happen to be in the area.

*[GASMAN puts on his parka. HOUSEMAN opens the door.]*

HOUSEMAN: You might be lucky and catch me home.

*[GASMAN goes through it.]*

HOUSEMAN: *[He's forgotten his t-shirt. How stupid can you be? It's still drying on the boiler. I must remind him... Why? He'll have to come back for it. And it'll be properly dry by then.]*

GASMAN: *[You think I've forgotten my t-shirt? I'm not that stupid. It's still be drying on the boiler. I should mention it at least... Why? I'll have to come back for it. And it'll be properly dry by then.]*

GASMAN: Keep smiling. You're not so bad-looking yourself, you know... See you, maybe!

HOUSEMAN: Tomorrow, maybe.

GASMAN: Maybe...

*[Fade to BLACKOUT]*